

INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY FROM OUR LOUNGE ROOM TO YOURS

Happy International Women's Day! Welcome to this special edition of the Sisterhood Lounge Room with Nicola and Julie. Together they look at how Jesus championed women throughout scripture and how He remains the greatest advocate of woman today.

As you watch this episode, we have highlighted the key scriptures, thoughts shared, as well as a few questions you can use in discussion with your groups or in your own time...enjoy.

Nicola outlined the context for women back in Greco-Roman times and how revolutionary Jesus was with women in that era. She explained that the primary role of women back then was to marry and bear children. Women were either the property of their husband if married, or of their father or brother, if not. Women were told what they could do, say, where they could go and were prohibited from learning scripture in the same way a man was. A woman's voice was also not valid: they were not allowed to speak in public spaces nor give testimony unless their account was corroborated by a man. Jewish men would recite a daily prayer giving thanks to God for three things: Not being born a gentile, not being born a woman, and not being born a slave. Understanding the culture of the time allows us to see how revolutionary Jesus interactions with women were and still are today, because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

With this context in mind, Nicola and Julie cover six themes in Jesus and his followers interactions with women:

1. Access
2. Relationship
3. Freedom
4. Voice
5. Purpose
6. Uniqueness

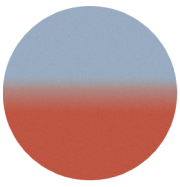
ACCESS

A woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.

Luke 8:43-48

Julie explained from the very beginning of Jesus's ministry women accompanied him on his journey. Jesus welcomed women from all backgrounds into his ministry like Mary Magdalene, Susanna, Salome, and Joanna. There are two women who anointed Jesus in scripture – one a close friend, another a notorious sinner. Both were equally received and are remembered for their acts of worship.

Julie recounted the story of the woman with the issue of blood who reached out to touch the hem of Jesus' cloak and was healed in Luke 8. She would have been deemed unclean and not allowed



Jesus wants to have a real relationship with us, not a transactional or obligatory one. 'Daughter' implies this intimate relationship.

Julie shared from her personal experience of not being able to call God 'father' during her first few years of faith. She felt more comfortable calling him, 'Lord.' It was only after time and understanding of how much God delights in her as a daughter that she now knows God as 'father'. She encouraged us by saying that no one loves us more than Jesus, and we can boldly know we have full access to Him.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 4:16

Q-Do you feel like God is accessible to you, that you can reach out any time and spend time with him?

Q-Do you struggle to call God 'father'?

Q-Thinking about God as Father and you as His daughter, what are three thoughts He has about you?

RELATIONSHIP

Nicola spoke on how we are invited to have both proximity and intimacy with Jesus.

Nicola shared the story of Mary and Martha from Luke 10. Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus was countercultural because only men were permitted to sit at the feet of Rabbis.

Martha was fulfilling the typical role of a woman by preparing food in the kitchen and became annoyed with Mary's behaviour and asked Jesus to dismiss her from His presence to help her instead. Jesus replied by saying that Mary was exactly where she should be.

Nicola said that she loved this picture of Mary at the feet of Jesus. She wasn't listening in from another room, but invited to sit at the feet of Jesus and be fully seen by Him, her presence was validated. The word 'sat' used in this account translates in the Greek to 'remain' and 'take up residence' meaning Mary was in proximity to Jesus for a long time. We not only have access to Jesus, but He invites us to have this close relationship with Him.

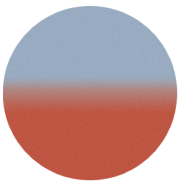
Nicola encouraged us to look at the relationship that Jesus invites us into today. He is the maker of the Heavens and the Earth, the King of Kings and yet we have a personal invitation to sit at His feet.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one, Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42

Q- Who are you most like in this passage, Mary or Martha?

Q- Do you find yourself busying yourself with life and missing moments with Jesus? If so how might you be more intentional to take time to sit with Him?



FREEDOM

When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity."

Luke 13:12

Julie shared three stories of freedom from scripture. The first was from Luke 13, where a woman was crippled/ bent over for 18 years by a spirit. Jesus placed His hands on her and immediately she straightened up and praised God, she was set free. Julie recalled a time when she herself felt bent over, not physically, but feeling particularly disempowered, and it was through an experience with the Lord at conference she came to the realisation that God does not desire her to live bound or shackled in anyway.

The second story is again, the woman with the issue of blood. Julie refers to the story as a reminder that Jesus not only wants to give us access to Him but to restore us. This woman would have been experiencing shame in her isolation from her community, and by calling her forward, Jesus not only restores her health, but her dignity. He frees her from her isolation, low social standing, and her shame. God never shames us, he nails our shame on the cross. Julie encouraged us to leave it there.

The third story found in John 8 is the women accused of adultery and brought to Jesus to be stoned to death. Instead of condemning her, Jesus challenges the crowd by saying "if any of you are without sin, cast the first stone", and one by one the crowd withdrew until only the woman and Jesus were left. Jesus then said to her that he did not condemn her either and to go and sin no more. This is how the Lord works - he has not come to condemn, but to save and give us a new beginning and a hope for a future.

The first word that God used to describe himself to Moses was 'compassionate,' which is an emotional word used to describe the strong bond between a parent and child. How extraordinary that God chooses to be intimate with us. If you are feeling bound, look up. If you are under the weight of your shame or sin, He desires to set you free.

Nicola observed that, throughout all those stories, it was the crowd that condemned, the community that were judgemental. She challenged us to look at how we view other people, because if Jesus is not judging others by their behaviours or circumstances, are we making sure that we are not.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Galatians 5:1

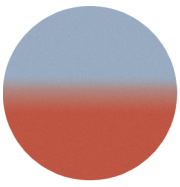
Q- How has shame impacted your walk with Jesus ?

Q- Do you carry shame in an area of your life today? What impact does it have on you and your relationship with God?

Q-Are you quick to pass judgment on others?

VOICE

Nicola reminded us that women's voices had no validation in Greco- Roman times, even in a court of law. Despite this, when Jesus was resurrected from death, He revealed himself to women first and entrusted them to be the custodians of the message that He was alive. The most foundational belief of our faith that Jesus not only died for our sins but defeated death and rose again, is founded on the



Nicola expressed how thankful she is that we have come such a long way since Greco-Roman times, but still in 2024, there is still an assignment to quash the voice of women.

Although this looks different across nations and cultures, it's a reality we should address especially on International Women's Day and look at how Jesus championed and released the voice of women then and continues to do so today. After Jesus ascended to heaven, his disciples continued to replicate this model. When Paul came to Europe for the first time and went to Philippi, he was not able to go to a synagogue to share the Gospel as there were none, nor did he find a Jewish community, but instead found a gentile woman called Lydia. Nicola explained that in the social standing of the day, to be not only a woman but a gentile woman was considered the lowest of the low, yet Paul shares the Gospel with her, and she went on to become the first church leader in Europe. If you ever doubt that God wants to give you a voice, just look at these verses where women in the hardest of contexts were exalted to share the Gospel. Nicola urged us to use our voice. It will look different for everyone, but let's not shy away from speaking truth over our children, in our workplace, or with our peers. Let's use our voice wisely.

It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

Luke 24:10

Q- As a woman have you ever felt like your voice had no authority or validation?

Q- How does knowing that Jesus empowered women to speak inspire you with your own voice?

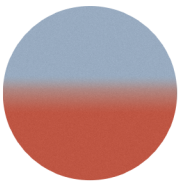
Q- Would you say you are using your voice wisely?

PURPOSE

Julie said that in Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul commends Phoebe as an outstanding leader. She was a deacon of the church, meaning she would have led aspects of church life if not led the church herself. She was a benefactor meaning she supported Paul and many others financially, and so was a woman of means. Paul gave her the letter to the Romans meaning she went from house church to house church, reading aloud and teaching the Gospel. Phoebe wasn't described as someone's wife or mother, but simply herself, in her own standing and authority as a woman of God, and that is how He sees us.

Julie explained that the same is true of Junia. In scripture she is described as an apostle meaning someone who starts the works of God, and she was also imprisoned for her work in spreading the Gospel. She defied the times and brought forth her gifts to be used by God. Julie shared three aspects of purpose: The first was that God said when he created human beings in Genesis that it was 'very good'. The fact that you exist is very good in God's sight. There is purpose for your existence at this time in history. The second is as Christians our role is to know God and to make God known. So, purpose comes in knowing that it is good that we exist and knowing our mission is to make Jesus known. Lastly, it's living out and understanding the greatest commandments given by Jesus: to love God and love others as we love ourselves.

Julie said Phoebe and Junia were women that knew why they existed. They were on mission to make Jesus known and they simply used their gifts in love and service to God and man. Whether we are a student or in our twilight years, are we loving God, loving people, and living purposefully as women released and championed by the King to make him known?



- Q- When you think of life ahead of you, who are you becoming?
- Q- How do you want to live and what is keeping you from living it?
- Q-What would you like written on your gravestone?

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

UNIQUENESS

Nicola said that it is our gifting that matters not our gender. Jesus championed uniqueness. Corinthians 12 tells us that we are all part of one body but have different parts to play. Nicola mentioned theologian, Ben Witherington who wrote about the different types of roles women held within the bible such as preachers, teachers, prophets, and those that financed the kingdom of God to name a few. He highlighted that when the Spirit fell on the early church, he was not confined by gender. Nicola explained that when the Holy Spirit gives gifts, He gives them uniquely, in Christ we each have our own part to play. So, it's important to understand that we have been given gifts that are unique to us and our calling. We each have a journey of discovering our own lane to run in. As we celebrate International Women's Day, let's celebrate one another, and not judge one another. Our lanes may look different and what we are called to do may differ, but we should cheer one another on and not compare ourselves. Comparison will either make us prideful or feel like a failure. Instead, let's be good stewards of what God has given us and celebrate our uniqueness.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.

Colossians 3:23

- Q- Do you know what your gifts and unique talents are and are you exercising them?
- Q-How can you remove comparison from your life and celebrate your own uniqueness?
- Q- How can you celebrate or encourage another woman today?

Prayer:

Jesus, we thank you for loving and championing us so perfectly. Help us to grow in our understanding of what this means for us personally, and to be more like you, and to love and champion one another well too. Amen